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and they grew closer.

It was a role reversal from what she remembered best of their former life.

"He took care of our hair back then," said Ms. Smith. "And he tried to weave his hair, even if he didn't have enough."

Mr. Smith died Oct. 27 at the age of 55 in his third floor room in the Elm Hotel. Ms. Smith, his only child at the memorial, said drugs and alcohol had weakened his liver. A neighbor said he also had diabetes.

Ms. Smith said that despite his trademark smile, her father's favorite hobby was watching horror movies. He had "too many," nearly 200 films.

"They were stacked, VHS and DVDs combined," said Deandre Jones, Ms. Smith's boyfriend, who also saw Mr. Smith regularly.

The memorial's dozen mourners remembered Mr. Smith as uncommonly upbeat — he was always smiling, never argued and was cordial, giving advice or inviting somebody to just hang out.

"He always offered a good thought or a good



Luke Smith and his daughter Gloria Smith

feeling, no matter what your day was like," said one man.

Another resident, who met Mr. Smith a year ago, said, "He told me, 'You're always welcome to come over.'"

"He was a part of the community, and he wasn't reclusive," said Scott Ecker, the Elm's support services director. "He had a lot of friends here and was well liked."

Kenneth Lawrence, who lived across from Mr. Smith, said that he still waits for his neighbor to walk out his door.

"I used to look at him like he was stuck on stupid," said Lawrence. "I couldn't understand why he was always so damn happy. Even when he went to the trash room to take out the trash, he was still smiling." ■

—KAREN DATANGEL

RAYMOND PUGLIESI Godfather of the Empress

Raymond "Tony" Pugliesi was a lot of things — a motorcycle gang member, bodybuilder, fix-it man, entrepreneur, addict and alcohol abuser — but to a special few he was "the godfather" of the Empress Hotel.

When residents and outsiders he knew told him they had a need, Mr. Pugliesi invited them to his fourth-floor room for an appointment. The room

was cluttered with nuts, bolts, little tools and crates of gadgets, plus a dozen cell phones and land line phones for his "businesses," as he called his jack-of-all-trades enterprise.

Mr. Pugliesi had a sharp mathematical mind and could fix anything electronic, charging from \$1 to \$3, said his In-Home Supportive Services worker, Phillip Allen Jr., after Mr. Pugliesi's Nov. 10 memorial service at the Empress. He sold broken things he had found and fixed, batteries he recharged, too. He always had projects going. The phones linked up his "networks" of people, who sought his advice and knowledge.

Mr. Pugliesi — the godfather — sat in the middle of the room in his elaborate, jerry-rigged wheelchair wearing a yellow hardhat. He'd have Allen sit quietly in the corner like a consigliere. Then he'd beckon the petitioner to "come and sit."

"He'd listen," Allen said, "then make a decision and usually give them what they asked for — money, a phone, a drink of expensive stuff, or just help them if they wanted to start a little business. And he'd give them advice. He'd look over at me to make sure I saw and heard everything, like he wanted me to tell the story someday."

Some, like adopted children, returned three and four times.

"He never expected anything in return," Allen said. "He told me he was trying to salvage the last vestige of good in them. Some took advantage of him. They ought to be here today and aren't."

Mr. Pugliesi was once a robust weightlifter who looked mean on a hog and wouldn't shun a fair fight. Many details of his life before he moved into the Empress four years ago remained unknown, but staff said he has family in Brooklyn and Illinois.

In recent months, drugs, alcohol and AIDS apparently took a toll. His health began to fail, he lost weight and was in pain he ignored. But nine days before he died, Allen said, he got clean and was full of life and optimism.

"I was really proud of him," Allen said. "Then Murphy's Law took over. He got despondent and wasn't eating right. I couldn't get him out of it."

When Mr. Pugliesi didn't answer calls for a couple of days, on Nov. 2 Allen and two staff members went into his room and found him dead. Mr. Pugliesi was 47. The medical examiner said cause of death was pending.

At his memorial, a few of Mr. Pugliesi's favorite things were on a table against the wall: a baseball cap with an embroidered marijuana leaf, a picture of a handsome white dog in a gold frame, a plastic toy three-wheel motorcycle and on it a buff rider with silver helmet and sunglasses, a small wooden box with a collage of tiny racecar pictures, a thick silver keychain with a marijuana leaf on the end. Behind these items was a bouquet of white mums, roses and carnations. On the wall were two pictures of the Brook-

lyn Bridge and a map of Brooklyn's neighborhoods.

Thirteen mourners attended his memorial. Several said they admired his generosity and craziness, which outweighed his sometimes "hard-ass" behavior.

A staff member distributed a printed tribute to Mr. Pugliesi with his picture on the sheet. Allen read aloud from it: "He lived his life like a roller-coaster, a wild unstoppable ride and a surprise at every turn. Unconventional, controversial, spirited, uniquely generous and stubborn, Raymond would never take no for an answer."

"All that is true," Allen said.

One neighbor recalled when Mr. Pugliesi got a squad of police with guns drawn to come charging up to his room, expecting real trouble.

"Tony was holed up in his room, laughing maniacally," the man said gleefully. He'd "glued his door shut" and covered the windows with black paper.

"Yeah," the neighbor said, "he was really enjoying himself."

"He was hard," said another man who used to get "blitzed" with him and could also call him by his nickname "Tony" with impunity. "But he wasn't hard. Someone in his presence that he liked, it was different. But he could make your life miserable if he was hard."

"He was generous from the heart," added another, "a cool dude with many characters."

A woman who once pushed him around the block said his wheelchair was "his spaceship." It had bells and whistles even "hidden daggers," Allen said, "in case he got caught in the red light district with his pants down."

"He was comfortable in his own skin," the woman said. "He had no conscience to worry about."

"And when he was the godfather," Allen said, "the only thing missing was the theme song." ■

—TOM CARTER



Raymond Pugliesi

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